

Comments on FCC Notice of Rule Making – EB Docket No. 06-119 (Recommendation of the Independent Panel Reviewing Hurricane Katrina's Impact on Communications Systems)

My Background: I have an A.B. and M.S in Physics and M.S. in Environmental Engineering. I worked for the U.S. Corps of Engineers R&D Facility for 36 years. I have been a ham for 48 years and have functioned as the ARRL Section Emergency Coordinator in Mississippi since 1998.

Comment: These comments are limited to Amateur Radio. In Mississippi we have more than our share of hurricanes, tornadoes, and ice storms. In order to be prepared to respond to these storm events we have HF emergency communications mutual assistance agreements with surrounding states to activate a wide-area HF tactical net, hold three daily HF nets to practice net procedures and formal message handling, as well as having provisions to activate 24/7 voice and Morse Code HF watch nets to respond to requirements that may not be appropriate for tactical nets such as health and welfare traffic. In addition, Mississippi has some 35 county Emergency Coordinators, who have Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) Units ready to respond to emergency situations. And, lastly, individual hams are encouraged to take the on-line emergency communications courses offered by FEMA and the ARRL.

Now with all of this preparation you would think Mississippi is ready for anything. We are in most cases (Katrina withstanding); however, a recurring problem that arises during each emergency/disaster event is hams that come out of the woodwork, who have never checked into a net, never handled a piece of formal traffic, and certainly don't speak the "emergency response language." They don't have a clue as to how to productively interface into the HF emergency communications environment.

The consequence is that these well meaning hams slow down movement of tactical and health/welfare traffic as they don't understand net procedures or formal traffic handling. As a result the Net Control Station has to dance around the problem to avoid chaos as he politely moves these ill-prepared hams off into a corner so that the trained cadre can conduct business. And now we have 06-119 with a proposal on the table to "Streamline the special temporary authority (STA) process" to elevate Technician Class Licensees to General or Extra Class. The net result will be to potentially add more ill trained hams into an already stressed HF emergency communications environment.

Don't get me wrong. A lot of critical communications can be handled on VHF by Technicians, but there is generally a significant difference in the level of operational expertise when comparing a VHF net on a local repeater and a wide area HF tactical net. The time for making the transition from VHF to HF is before a storm event not during a storm event.